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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/MTS - M. COPPOLA

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TAGS: PGOV PTER SN

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE RELEASES TWO TERROR SUSPECT DETAINEES

REF: SINGAPORE 227

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel Shields for reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) publicly announced on June 16 the release of two men from preventive detention under the Internal Security Act; unusually, one of the men released had been in custody for no more than a month. Arifin Ali (alias John Wong Ah Hung), a former senior Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) member, is the latest jihadist detainee to be deemed rehabilitated by Singapore's Religious Rehabilitation Group (reftel). Arifin spent the last six years in preventive detention, accused of plotting terror attacks in Thailand in 2002-2003, including attacks on Singapore's embassy and ambassador that were never carried out. He will remain subject to a Restriction Order limiting his movements and activities for at least two more years. Using the same language as in previous similar releases, the Home Ministry said Arifin had cooperated in investigations, shown progress in his rehabilitation, and been judged to no longer pose a security threat that requires further preventive detention.

¶2. (C) Singapore's handling of the second released detainee, Singaporean citizen Ahmad Jalaluddin bin Sanawi, contrasts markedly with its handling of previous detainees. A member of and fundraiser for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who underwent military training with the group, Ahmad allegedly left Singapore in December 2001 and "remained in hiding overseas to evade the Singapore authorities," according to MHA's press release. He surrendered to Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) in April 2009 - though the MHA statement does not say where or why - and the ISD released him from custody on May 6 under a two-year Restriction Order. Neither the MHA statement nor the government-linked Straits Times newspaper account of Ahmad's release explains how or why an MILF member who had been on the lam for over seven years was determined not to pose a security threat so quickly after being taken into custody.

¶3. (C) In discussing the Arifin case with Poloff, American citizen John Harrison, a scholar specializing in security and terrorism issues at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, said Singapore's "12-step jihadi program" is both thorough and carefully administered. In Harrison's view, Singapore does not release a detainee, even subject to a Restriction Order, until it has invested the time it believes necessary to achieve reliable rehabilitation. But Harrison struggled to explain the different treatment accorded Ahmad. He suggested that Singapore regards MILF members, who are generally uninterested in Singaporean targets, as a lesser threat than JI members; he also observed that Ahmad must have been extremely cooperative after surrendering.

¶4. (S) Singapore officials briefed Embassy officers about the two releases on June 15, the same day Singapore released Arifin. Post's Legal Attache believes that the Singapore government will keep a very close watch on Arifin. However, the Singapore officials gave no indication that they consider Ahmad to be an ongoing security threat. They emphasized that Ahmad's MILF connections dated from the early 1990s and that there was no evidence of more recent interaction. Although that explanation cannot be discounted, the unusually short period between Ahmad's surrender and release suggests to LegAtt that Ahmad may also be an ongoing ISD source. Upcoming high-profile meetings of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation being hosted by Singapore could explain why the ISD might be placing such contacts in circulation now.

¶5. (C) In response to the releases of Arifin and Ahmad, Post convened a meeting of its core Emergency Action Committee (EAC) June 17. The group determined that the releases do not fundamentally affect the adequacy of Post's existing security measures. As a precaution, however, Post is obtaining photographs of Arifin, which will be provided to Embassy guards, the Embassy Surveillance Detection Unit, and Commander, Logistics Group, Western Pacific (COMLOG WESTPAC) at Sembawang. RSO will also liaise with Singapore police contacts to obtain information about Arifin's activities following his release.

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